



# Senator Margarita Prentice

11th Legislative District

2005 END OF SESSION NEWSLETTER

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Dear Friends:

The 2005 Legislature has ended and I'm pleased to report it was the most productive session in recent history. Still affected by the initiatives that involved additional funds and another that eliminated a revenue source, the Legislature made tough decisions to close the \$1.7 billion deficit and maintain essential services. It took a bipartisan effort to pass landmark legislation making government more accountable, improve our schools, transportation, public health, and elections system. All of this was done without a general tax increase and leaving \$210 million in the ending fund balance.

The format of this newsletter is a little different from previous years. Since I now chair the Ways and Means committee, my focus is more on the fiscal aspect of issues (what they cost). The hot topics from our constituents as well as items that directly impact our district are also highlighted. Feel free to contact me on these or other issues of interest.

Thanks to all of you who e-mailed, snail-mailed, called the office or Legislative hotline during the session. Your comments and concerns are essential to my representing our district and I appreciate hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Margarita Prentice".

*State Senator*

*11th Legislative District*

# Operating Budget

Following are major items for agencies and programs in this year's budget. The finalized budget can be viewed in its entirety at <http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Senate/Committees/WM/>.

## Health care

### Home Care Workers & Kids Top Priorities

Home care worker contracts were fully funded with an annual wage increase of 26 cents per hour and an increase in their benefits' package. With an additional \$15 million, rates are increased to subsidize child care paid by low-income and at-risk families.

### Long-term Care & Our Seniors

Seniors who pay the long term care \$6.50 per day quality maintenance fee will get some relief by a reduction and eventual elimination in four years. Lower prescription costs could come from the State Board of Pharmacy applying for a waiver from the FDA and then negotiating reciprocal agreements with Canadian and other wholesalers. This will allow residents to purchase imported medicines at their neighborhood pharmacy. The Prescription Drug purchasing consortium from the 2003 session has been expanded to allow uninsured citizens, private businesses, labor unions, etc., to join this discount program.

### Mental Health Parity Funded

One of the most important pieces of

health care legislation this year is mental health parity.

Mental health services will be as affordable as a physical illness covered by a health plan. Washington State joins 30 other states that have already enacted similar legislation. We also backfilled the loss of \$80 million in Federal Medicaid mental health monies.

## Education

### Funding Initiatives 732 and 728

We could no longer ignore the initiatives passed in 2000 that have remained unfunded until this year. I-732 gives teachers a 1.2 percent cost of living (COLA) during the 2005-2006 school year with an additional 1.7 percent the next school year. I-728 guarantees smaller class sizes. Our students will be the real winners!

### Training for Teachers & Funding for Programs

Readiness to Learn and Learning Assistance Program (LAP) have proven to be very successful programs for our special needs students. Both are fully

funded with LAP based on poverty so districts won't lose money with improved test scores.

Special training for our teachers will be provided specifically for students with special needs such as dyslexia and other learning disabilities. Teacher certification rules were strengthened and endorsement requirements are to be developed for teachers of hearing-impaired students.

## Environment

### Conservation & Protection

The overall goal for our state's environment is to clean up and conserve. This year's budget includes \$9 million for the State Toxic Control Account

to clean up a variety of toxic waste sites around the state. Passage of the California vehicle emission standards beginning in the year 2010 is another strong step in stopping the release of harmful pollutants.

## Green Buildings, Clean Oceans

Some of our new public construction will be required to be "green buildings" emphasizing fresh air, natural light, low toxins and clean storm water. Other legislation protects the Hood Canal, creates an Ocean Policy Review Commission and an Oil Spill Advisory Council to solve problems with our ocean systems.

## Criminal Justice/ Public Safety

### Local Law Enforcement & Justice System Improvements

An additional \$4.6 million has been allocated for the funding of our local law enforcement. The DNA analysis, forensics, and crime labs are critical pieces of our local law enforcement agencies and assists in reducing crime rates around the state. To help improve our justice system, the legislature included \$1.2 million to better train, compensate, and improve the quality of a variety of civil legal services.

## Transportation Budget

Many of our state's roads and highways need major redesign and maintenance work. This year's transportation budget provides funding to get started and to leverage federal funds, grants, etc. This budget can be found in its entirety at <http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Senate/Committees/TRAN/>.

## Gas Tax Funds State Highways

An increase in the state gas tax takes effect this July 1. Gas will increase three cents this summer, two cents next July, and 1.5 cents the following year. The state constitution guarantees that the gas tax revenues are used only for state highways across our state.



## Changes in Weight Fees

Annual vehicle weight fees depend on the size of a vehicle. A passenger car up to 4,000 lbs. is \$10. A full-size pickup up to 6000 lbs. is \$20. A sport utility vehicle up to 8,000 lbs. is \$30; and vehicles 8,000 lbs. or more will pay commercial weight fees. The annual fee for motor homes is \$75 and a light utility trailer weighing 2,000 lbs. has been reduced from \$30 to \$15.

## Accountability & Performance Audits

Creation of the Transportation Performance Audit Board will assure timely completions within the transportation project's budget. TPAB -- consisting of private citizens with transportation expertise -- will submit a process for performance audits of transportation projects to the Legislature. The state auditor has \$4 million to contract out independent performance audits.

## Transportation Alternatives

There are many transportation alternatives provided for commuters and travelers alike. The legislature has allocated \$51 million a year for freight and passenger rail, bus services, park and ride lots and other proven strategies to get vehicles off the road.

## Major Regional Transportation Targets

Projects that have been funded this year include:

- ▶ \$2 billion for SR 99 Alaskan Way Viaduct
- ▶ \$500 million for SR 520 Floating Bridge
- ▶ \$972 million for I-405 improvements
- ▶ \$435 million for I-90 Snoqualmie Pass



## 11th District Projects

- Strander Blvd. Expansion/SW 27th Connection
- I-5 South Seattle northbound viaduct
- SR 99/Duwamish River/First Avenue South Bridge - new southbound bridge
- SR 169/140th Way SE
- I-405/I-5 to SR 181
- I-405/SR 167 to SR 169
- I-405/SR 515 Interchange improvements
- SR 167/I-405 to SE 180th Street
- SR 518/SeaTac Airport to I-5/I-405 interchange

## Taxes

A variety of tax increases were passed this session.

## Tobacco Products

The same enforcement mechanisms and requirements for the sale of cigarettes now apply to tobacco products. Since I-773 passed increasing the tax on cigarettes, there's been an increase in Internet and black market sales of certain tobacco products. Increased enforcement, compliance and lower prices will generate more legitimate sales and tax revenues for the Health Services Account, the General Fund and the Water Quality Account and effective July 1.

## Estate Tax

The estate tax is reimposed on estates of \$1.5 million and up effective immediately. It increases to \$2 million in 2006. Funds will go to the Education Legacy Trust Account.

## Cigarettes & Liquor

The cigarette tax is increased by 60 cents per pack. The revenue will go to the Education Legacy Trust Account in the Student Achievement Fund. Revenues from a \$1.33 per liter tax on alcoholic beverages

will go to the Violence Reduction and Drug Enforcement Account.

## Election Reform

Several comprehensive election reform measures will improve voter confidence, state wide election rules, and ballot security. The bill changing the primary election date did not pass.

## Omnibus Elections Reform

SB 5499 provided for a variety of election reform. This bill includes

standardizing ballot handling and counting procedures for provisional ballots; requires that poll voters show identification; county auditors' reconciliation reports must be available at certification and original ballots will not

be altered in any way. It creates state-wide signature verification standards for absentee ballots, creates a central database of eligible voters that will be frequently updated to remove names of felons and deceased available this coming January. The certification period is lengthened to 21 days for the return of military ballots; and, criminalizing voting twice and destroying voter registrations by making these acts a felony offense.

## Mail-In Ballots & Voter Registration

Countywide mail-in ballot elections are approved effective July, 31, 2005. Voter registration has also been changed to ensure felons, deceased, and non-citizens do not cast votes.

## Electronic Machines & Military Votes

Electronic machines are required to have a voter-verifiable paper trail. Another bill requires counties to send military voters information specific to their unique voting circumstances.



## MORE LEGISLATION

### Problem Gambling Funding

A steady source of funding for treatment is provided by a new tax on state-sanctioned games. The Lottery Commission and tribal casinos will also participate. Several tribes have already made substantial voluntary contributions to this fund.

### District Capital Budget Projects:

Asian Counseling and Referral Service - \$2,000,000  
Cesar Chavez Park - \$150,000  
Childhaven - \$150,000  
El Centro de la Raza - \$900,000  
Filipino Community Center - \$200,000  
Greenbridge Plaza in White Center - \$200,000  
Relocation of Sieke Japanese Gardens - \$250,000  
Tukwila Kayak and Canoe launching facility - \$20,000  
West Seattle Community Resource Center - \$500,000  
Wing Luke Asian Art Museum - \$2,000,000  
Greenbridge Youth and Family Center - \$300,000  
Burien Town Square - \$2,000,000  
Tukwila Southcenter Parkway infrastructure - \$6,000,000

### Unemployment Insurance

Changes to unemployment insurance are made without raising business taxes so seasonal workers are not as adversely affected. It also gives stakeholders two years to work on more permanent solutions to seasonal UI benefits.

### Apprenticeships

An important part in the success of our workforce, apprenticeships approved by the State Apprenticeship Council will perform 15% of the labor hours on public projects.

### Initiative 601

In 1993, I-601 established a state General Fund expenditure limit and restrictions on state fee and revenue increases. This session, the Legislature

voted to increase state revenue by a majority vote taking effect immediately. In two years, the state expenditure limit will apply to the state General Fund and five additional funds including: the Health Services Account, the Violence Reduction & Drug Enforcement Account, the Public Safety & Education Account, the Water Quality Account, and the Student Achievement Fund.

### State Need Grant

The State Need grant has been expanded to include more low income students and many of the students available for the discontinued Washington Promise Scholarship. The maximum income for a family of four is increased from \$36,500 to \$43,000. The amount of the grant is determined by the college the student attends.



### Pages

It is always a pleasure to have students from our local schools serve as Senate pages. They are in Olympia for a week working within the Legislature. A student must be 14 years old but not yet 17 by the time he or she pages. Applications are accepted on a first come first served basis and are available through my office or online at <http://www.leg.wa.gov/senate/sadm/senpage.htm>.

(Page: Carmen Rivera - Charles A. Lindbergh High School)

